

Appl. No. 10/600,131
Amdt. Dated October 6, 2004
Reply to Office Action of July 6, 2004

ATTORNEY DOCKET NO. 6229**REMARKS**

Claims 1 - 8 have been rejected. Claims 1, 6, and 7 have been amended and claims 1 - 8 remain in the application.

The Office Action indicates that correction of informalities in the drawings is required. Substitute formal drawings are enclosed.

Claims 1 - 8 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Thomas. (U.S. Patent 6,347,912).

Thomas has been cited as disclosing "a floating offshore structure having a center well 16 and cylinder-stem assembly received supporting a riser, having the center well gap controlling interface guide, cylinder 28 attached to the longitudinal upper portion (relative terminology in which figure 1 can be considered to show the upper portion due to the broken line marks of elements 26 and 24) of the riser 24, a wear strip 42 (at least 3; claims 6 & 7) mounted on the exterior circumference (figure 3) and positioned an angle relative to tangent to the exterior said cylinder (since no specific position at which the tangent is taken has been claim and the wear surface of 42, the thickness side, is considered to be at 90 degrees to the tangent at 38); and also the mating guide 44 mounted the center well of the floating offshore structure center well of the floating offshore structure and at an elevation such that for all vertical positions of the cylinder-stem assembly there sufficient area interface with said longitudinal wear strip (figure 2)."

As concerns claims 2 and 8, Thomas is cited as showing "a wear stop 60 attached to said mating guide and facing said wear strip."

As concerns claims 3 - 4, Thomas is cited as showing "mating guide 44 is non-compliant and compliant (due to the nature of the material and relativeness of the term compliant)."

As concerns claim 5, Thomas is cited as showing "at least three sets said wear strips and mating guides are spaced around the circumference of said cylinder (figure 3) "

The rejection is duly noted but applicants respectfully traverse.

Claims 1, 6, and 7 have been amended to indicate that the cylinder attached to the riser is a buoyancy cylinder and that the gap between the wear strip and mating guide is adjustable. The

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amendment is supported in the application as originally filed.

In Thomas, the gap is fixed between the ends of the radial partitions 38 and the sliding blocks 42. Thomas makes no reference whatsoever to rotational alignment. Thus, rotational alignment cannot be anticipated by Thomas. Thomas is directed to axial control and not gap control as is the present invention.

In the present invention, the gap is adjustable between the wear strip and the mating guide simply by rotation of the buoyancy cylinder and riser.

In Thomas, the "mechanism for hauling the riser" is attached to the hull (Col. 1, line 61) and comprises a hydropneumatic ram..

In the present invention, the buoyancy can, e.g. the "hauling mechanism", is attached to the riser itself and not the hull. Therefore, the riser is supported independently of the hull without the use of a hydropneumatic ram. The hull provides only lateral stability for the riser – and no axial support.

In Thomas (Col. 2, line 6), the "base" referred to is at the keel level of the semi-submersible. The broken lines 26 and 24 in Fig. 1 are the mooring lines and the riser, respectively. There is no re-arrangement of these lines that would place items 22 and 28 at any elevation other than at the keel. Therefore, irrespective of any language in Thomas, it is directed to a keel located mechanism.

In the present invention, the "vertical passage" for the buoyancy cylinder is at the hull level – and not at a submerged base as in Thomas.

In Thomas, the link between the float and riser is a ball joint that simply allows the riser to rest upon the float.

In the present invention, the buoyancy cylinder is attached to the riser and there is no ball joint.

The present invention does not connect the floating structure to the seabed as in Thomas. The riser is supported axially by the sole means of the buoyancy cylinder and receives only lateral stabilization from the hull. The hull moves vertically independent of the riser.

The cited art neither discloses nor teaches the arrangement disclosed and claimed in the present application where the riser is supported by an attached buoyancy cylinder and the invention is directed to a gap controlling interface guide wherein the gap is adjustable between the wear strip and mating guide simply by rotation of the buoyancy cylinder and riser. In view of the above amendments and

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remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the rejection is overcome and that the claims distinguish the present invention over the cited art and it is respectfully requested that a notice of allowance issue in due course.

Respectfully submitted,

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